

Cultural Composition: Stuart Hall on Ethnicity and the Discursive Turn

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Stuart Hall has been preoccupied with how to think questions of race for more than thirty years. From his own deliberate attempt to think of himself as a "black man" and as a black public intellectual, to his recent work on postcolonial theory, Hall continues to focus on the formation and material effects of concepts of ethnicity. The term *multiculturalism*, for example, is played out very deliberately in his writing in order to identify and work against what he sees as the negative meanings embedded in the term. Multiculturalism is often equated with an essentialized notion of ethnicity in which "everybody secure within his or her own ethnic group is competing with other ethnic groups on a hierarchy for resources" while each individual is "slotted into a pluralist space." Hall, however, supports the notion of an "adjectival multiculturalism" that expresses a "sliding and translation" between differences, a "mongrelization" of cultural identities without idealized, homogeneous, originary pasts. This attention to language is part of what Hall calls "the discursive turn." Like Raymond Williams, whom he speaks of with great admiration and affection, Hall sees language as an unavoidable game of meaning-making that cuts both ways. "Everybody," he argues in the interview below, "has an ethnicity because everybody comes from a cultural tradition, a cultural context." The essentialist notion of ethnicity is "extremely damaging" because it "doesn't allow for pluralization; it doesn't allow for hybridization." But since ethnicity as a concept is necessary, there must be, for Hall, a

"contestation around the very term itself."

Hall believes that certain concepts are indispensable despite their traditional connotations, so we must use them under erasure until we develop a more adequate language. Those concepts can "no longer be said and thought in the paradigmatic position of their old theoretical constructs," according to Hall, and that is why we are in the "deconstructive moment." In order to think and act, we must position ourselves within contemporary language games on the "underside, the disturbed, subverted side of the positive concepts."

The cyclical nature of "the world of theory" is also characterized by both trace and emergent elements. New theories are not generated without "taking on board the baggage that the concepts are already carrying from older meanings." Hall sees scholarship that simply "operates on the new" without excavating and addressing the traces of older meanings as untenable—untenable and potentially damaging because theory is "a deadly serious matter." Hall cautions against "subscribing wholly" to one theory or theorist. Theory will always entail "dogmatic closures" that will try, as all closures do, to establish "identity positions," and those positions that are necessarily left outside will become "the excluded, constituted other that will return to haunt the field and disturb the paradigm." This, argues Hall, is "precisely why one cannot become the disciple of a theory."

The deliberate tension of Hall's relationship to language and to theory is echoed in his political work in Great Britain. As a black public intellectual and an activist of the New Left, Hall nevertheless has tried to avoid representing the life experiences of others. His own life was "deeply protected" in that he "did not share the experiences of people who were constantly refused housing and decent public services." He stresses that he was "deeply and profoundly . . . privileged in relation to the majority experience of blacks." To offer himself as a representative of "black experience" would have been "a categoric mistake," a "deep, profound misrecognition." Hall notes that we often misrecognize the way in which class intersects with race in precisely this way.

In the following interview, Hall declares that intellectuals are often party to such misrecognitions, that they sometimes "come on as if what they want to do is divest themselves of their intellectual responsibility and just be the guys in the hood—and they're not." The politics of academic work is found, not in intellectuals' "turning

up in front of the factory gate and pretending they're Lenin," but, rather, in "turning ideas into everyday practice." "It has to do," he insists, "with their attention to the articulation between the philosophical and the popular."

Hall's comments regarding the pedagogical uses of the popular will be of particular interest to compositionists. In recent years the field of composition and rhetoric has paid a considerable amount of attention to pedagogical methods that incorporate popular culture into the classroom. While Hall certainly approves of the popular as an instrument of pedagogy and as an object worthy of critical inquiry, he cautions against what he sees as "academic repetition." He speaks of growing "disillusionment" with cultural studies now that it is no longer in its "ascendancy." He recognizes the unfortunate proliferation of pedagogical practices given a cultural studies tag that are "simply a waste of everyone's time." He offers, however, a firm admonition to remember why we went to the popular in the first place: "It's not just an indulgence and an affirmation; it's a political, intellectual, pedagogical commitment. Everybody now inhabits the popular . . . so that does create a set of common languages. To ignore the pedagogical possibilities of common languages is extremely political."

Q. You have described identity as a "production," a "matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being.'" You have been and continue to be a prolific writer; you write passionately, often personally, and you publish in various public and academic forums. How does your writing continue to construct your identity? And how does your cultural and historical identity continue to construct you as a writer?

A. The point that I have made about identity is, perhaps, a familiar one, but it is worth restating. It's the notion that identity is always in the making. There is one idea of identity as a fixed position, and another idea that identity is relative to the extreme. There is now a third position in that debate because I think those people have moved away from identity as process and have sometimes gone right over to the point where identity is nothing at all; it's a kind of open field where one just sort of occupies a particular identity out of habit. So it is that there's no fixed identity, but it's not that there's just an open-ended horizon where we can just intentionally

choose. What that means is that there is no final, finished identity position or self simply then to be produced by the writing. Any cultural practice plays a role in the construction of identity. While it's true that you may have a very clear notion of what the argument is and that you may be constructing that argument very carefully, very deliberately, your identity is also in part *becoming through the writing*. It's inflected by the very language you use because in order to express something, to occupy language, you are necessarily playing a game—a language game that other people have played and used. Meaning is already sediment in that language, so you reactivate all those other marks of meaning as well as what *you're* trying to say. Of course, writing is also a production, a production of knowledge and a production of a version of the self.

Q. Historically and contextually, at the moment of writing.

A. Yes, exactly. And we therefore occupy our identities very retrospectively: having produced them, we then know who we are. We say, "Oh, that's where I am in relation to this argument and for these reasons." So, it's exactly the reverse of what I think is the common-sense way of understanding it, which is that we already know our "self" and then put it out there. Rather, having put it into play in language, we *then* discover what we are. I think that only then do we make an investment in it, saying, "Yes, I like that position, I am that sort of person, I'm willing to occupy that position." Then it becomes a kind of space of enunciation for further thoughts and a space for other kinds of practices. The reverse is also true: you can produce a self in writing that is not close to a position you want to hold for very long, and others that go off on tangents and don't engage the unconscious.

Q. Do you go back and read your own writing?

A. I do, yes—not to think how wonderful I was, but because I'm not a terribly good editor of my own writing. Three weeks later I will see things wrong with my writing that I didn't see at the time. So that's one kind of rereading. Another kind of rereading is sort of incidental. I've been winding up my work after being at the Open University for seventeen years, so I'm throwing away a lot of paper. I'm really surprised by all kinds of things, particularly a certain kind of recurrence, a certain consistency that I hadn't been aware of. And I say this because I'm not attached to consistency. I don't think it's a terrible thing that I'm saying something

different now from what I said in the 1980s. Times have moved on, so why shouldn't one say that? So I'm a bit surprised to find that I still think about class what I thought in the 1960s. It's really quite sad to find out that one doesn't move on, or that one has only five thoughts in a lifetime. [Laughter.] Perhaps there are ten good things you might think in a lifetime and you sort of go on thinking around those same lines. But I am struck by the fact that I have been preoccupied by the same kinds of questions throughout many different kinds of writings, and I only see this retrospectively when I look back at things I've written.

Q. So there is a consistency, not so much in the answers but in the kinds of questions you ask.

A. Yes, exactly. The answers change, the answers *have* changed, certainly, but the questions have remained largely the same.

Q. You've written eloquently about Raymond Williams' influence on your own intellectual growth. You've also spoken very specifically about his commitment to using what he called a "shared" vocabulary and about his writing: his style, his ability to address a wider audience than just his immediate peers. How has Williams' writing, as such, influenced your own writing? I'm thinking particularly of your comments in "Only Connect" that address his sentence structure, his word choice, and so on.

A. His is a very distinctive style. He has more than one style, for one thing. He has a style that is directed toward a general public, a general readership rather than a narrowly academic or intellectual one; and he has a more serious, intellectual style that is unique in a number of ways. One is the ability to connect areas and experiences and structures, as he does with a phrase like "structure of feeling." This is an oxymoron because you know that structures don't have feelings and feelings don't have structures. But "structure of feeling of an age" is exactly the intangible ethos that is the complex, cultural outcome of a variety of different practices. If you can grasp what the structure of feeling is, grasp the sort of background, the emotional canvas on which other debates are taking place, you can perhaps also see that the people who are opposed in terms of their positions also share something vital, something immensely important, because they're both part of that structure of feeling. Although they may oppose one another in terms of their logical political argument, they also have a basis for a dialogue. So, Raymond is wonderfully suggestive, and I like Key

Words very much because it's neither a strictly lexicographical exercise nor an attempt to write a definitive history. Those things are extraordinarily rich for me in terms of his writing.

But there is a problem, and I would locate it around his generalizations. His generalizations are very abstract. Now, that may sound paradoxical, because aren't all generalizations necessarily abstract? If you look at some of the abstract notions—abstract, as it were, above the concreteness of the things that they're referring to—you can't help but ask yourself, "What is it about the nineteenth century that he's talking about here?" His writing, his generalizations, drive some people wild. I think his writing takes this maddening form for two reasons. First, British intellectual life is not very philosophical. It's not philosophical in the way in which French intellectual life is. It's full of moral, social, and ethical generalizations, but it's not full of philosophical concepts; it's not good at conceptual theory. Books like *Culture and Society* and *The Long Revolution* are Williams' attempts to inhabit an English idiom that is distinctive because it's morally and socially rooted, and they are attempts to think in a sort of general way. It's as if he wants to use moral, concrete concepts in a philosophically abstract way, and I think this is because he inhabits a particular discourse that relates to nineteenth-century moral philosophers and writers. That tradition, which comes out of thinkers such as Leavis, is very literary and doesn't have access to a continuous philosophical tradition.

But there's a second reason for the maddening form of Raymond's writing, which some people cite as a sort of evasiveness in his work. This is partly because the language Williams uses is negotiating his complicated relationship to Marxism. He wants to go on using certain basic Marxist ideas, but he refuses to be trapped in the whole series of Marxist concepts. So he will not use "mode of production" until very late because this term is already fixed in a certain way that he doesn't want, but he does want to talk about what he calls a "general mode of life," and this both is and isn't a proper Marxist concept. I think this tension in Williams is one that runs throughout most of British cultural studies, a tension that comes from being influenced by certain very important concepts in Marxism, being concerned about questions that Marxism put on the agenda, but steadfastly refusing the reductionist forms of Marxism that have dominated intellec-

tual life. All of us have been inside and outside that vocabulary, wanting to use it without being trapped by it. Much of Williams' work is marked by this struggle. It's not so much in the later work, because the later work was written in the 1970s and 1980s when a particular kind of Marxism did become a permissible language through Althusser, Gramsci, and others. And although he's very much *not* an Althusserian, I think that in a work like *Marxism and Literature* he felt able to engage Marxist ideas much more directly than he had in his earlier work. The earlier work is a struggle to avoid being pigeonholed by a language that he nevertheless wants to echo.

- Q. Almost like a rebellious son who is never quite able to leave the family.
- A. Yes—never able to leave the family, never wanting to leave the family entirely, but wanting to refuse the patriarchal authority and the reductionism that a certain kind of canonical language has. This goes back to your original question. It's a production of a new kind of self in writing.
- Q. You say in "Our Mongrel Selves" that the millions of currently displaced people are "obliged to inhabit at least two identities, to speak at least two cultural languages, to negotiate and 'translate' between them. . . . But they are also obliged to come to terms with and to make something new of the cultures they inhabit, without simply assimilating to them." You also cite Salman Rushdie's description of "mass migration" as a gift of great possibility for the world. Do such discussions, wherein the cultural "obligations" of the displaced and the cultural "possibilities" of hybridity are touted, cast the diasporic subject in the role of sacrificial lamb? Can such language really intervene in the diaspora experience?
- A. I don't think it puts the migrating subject in the position of the sacrificial lamb, though genuinely living between and within two or more cultures is at best a difficult proposition. Nor do I think that I use the diasporic or migratory subject as a kind of celebratory figure, which is something that I've been accused of. Migration is a very troubling experience in terms of the sense of uprootedness, the sense of displacement, that the majority of people who migrate must contend with. Some people choose to do so, can afford to do so and have another life, but the majority of people who are migrating have no choice. Migration is a fantastic, mass phenomenon of the late twentieth century—both

forced and free migration. There's nothing celebratory about it. So, this is to explain my use of this figure. It is a figure for me, and it is a metaphorical figure—not entirely but partly. What I mean by this is that what the migratory or diasporic subject has been obliged to go through is increasingly the condition of everybody, whether they're migrating or not. It's not that the migratory subject is some wonderful or special being, or has been selected by god—or punished by god—but simply that his or her experience now coincides with what is increasingly a global experience. Fewer and fewer cultures are originary; fewer and fewer cultures can identify any lines of stable continuity between their origins and the present. The more we know about all these cultures, including the ones that do their best to preserve their internal homogeneity, the more we understand how diverse their sources are, how much they've been influenced by others, how much they've borrowed across the borderlines. The borders have all been porous. So, our condition, the condition of all of us—even people who haven't moved an inch—is to discover our increasingly diverse cultural composition.

The migratory subject, then, who has been obliged to discover this condition and who is more self-conscious about it than somebody who has never moved physically, is at least in the position of pedagogical figure because that experience becomes a kind of representative experience from which we can draw lessons. Now, "What lessons?" you want to know. Not the lesson that these are wonderful people who have special gifts or anything like that, but just that they can do what everybody is now required to do, which is to produce culture, produce new cultures from old, produce new cultures out of the bringing together of diverse, other cultural traditions. That's what we're *all* doing, but the migration and diasporic experience highlights that process. There's no mistaking that every diaspora—no matter how much it is transfixed by the dream or myth (and sometimes the grim reality) of going back to where it came from (which usually involves displacing people who are now there)—has to come to terms with the new conditions in which it exists. Think of the cuisines of the Jewish diasporas. Jewish cooking is, of course, about Judaism and its extremely strict rules of transmission precisely about diet; and yet, Jewish cooking is an incredibly diverse field *because it is a diasporic field*. Ashkenazi Jews have taken on Middle

Eastern cooking, whereas Sephardic Jews have taken on North African cooking. That's what Jewish cooking is: it is the sum of these differences. The differences aren't nothing. They broadly identify as a cultural configuration, something that is no longer one thing. If you've ever been through a diasporic experience, you would understand that this is how culture works. Of course, what you often do is exactly the opposite: you manufacture a myth of homogeneity, of purity, but the reality is that you live in a mixed, mongrelized world. And, increasingly, everybody lives in a mixed, mongrelized world. The non-diasporic English subject who hasn't moved an inch from Hackney or East Bethnal Green is living in a cultural world of which his or her grandmother or grandfather could not have dreamed. They wouldn't recognize what this world is. The diasporic experience is a figure; it's a figure for the increasing pluralization of cultural forms and for the insistence that culture works not by perfectly reproducing itself into infinity, but precisely by *translating between*. Nor is the diasporic figure just an imitation, a mimicry of what it's supposed to subscribe to; it's a third thing, shifting and in process, at once making cultural meaning and being made by culture.

- Q. Words like *imitation*, *mimicry*, *shifting*, and *in process* might just as easily be used to describe "the postmodern."
- A. It's very reflective of that. The postmodern has a certain twist to it, conceptually, that I find myself not really being able to follow. First of all, there's a kind of celebration of postmodernity that I think is a deeply Eurocentric and Western phenomenon. The "end of history" idea can only be embraced by those who've benefitted thus far from history. If you've lost at history, you need a little bit more history; you need history to go on for a bit longer before you'll want to declare it to be at an end. If you've done extremely well out of the historic process, you can declare, "Here we stand and no further; there's nothing more to come." It's a kind of Parisian, left-bank closure that says, "We have got there, so this is the end of history for everyone."
- Q. If we decide not to play, then there is no game.
- A. Yes, then the game must be over. Then there's the celebration of fragmentation, and I don't want to celebrate fragmentation. If you've come, as I have, from a culture like the Caribbean where everybody is diasporic, then you know that indigenous people no longer exist. Everybody who's there came from somewhere else:

Africa, Europe, China, East India, and so on. If you've been through that, and you've been through the plantation and slave experience, you don't celebrate fragmentation. So I emphasize diversity rather than fragmentation: many elements, none of them wholly integrated, but not just shards, not just splinterings. The act of splintering doesn't suggest to me that anything emerges from it. Out of diversity, however, come new culture, new cultural forms. Out of cultural crossovers comes new music, not emptiness. So, I want to stay this side of validating a kind of postmodern excess that I don't find myself comfortable with. When I say that many of the ways that I'm trying to think questions of how culture operates and how identity operates are inflected by postmodern theory, I don't mean that sort of thing.

Q. But you do invoke theory, postmodern and otherwise. Do you find pleasure in the act of theorizing, as many intellectuals do? And why do you think we speak so seldom of that pleasure?

A. There's no question about that: it is a pleasurable intellectual activity, and we don't talk about it. On the other hand, in the end theory is a deadly serious matter, but not as theory. I'm not interested in theory as such. I'm only interested in theory insofar as it helps our common-sense understanding. There's a lot of playful postmodernism that is an innocent enough game; there are many more dangerous games than playful postmodernism. On the other hand, postmodernism applied to really thinking about the relations between the First and the Third World is an extremely dangerous operation, and so one has to be careful about subscribing wholly to one theory or theorist. When you're as old as I am and you've seen enough of them go by, you can never give yourself wholeheartedly to any one of them or you'll be out of date like an old Ford and at the next turn you'll be left behind. This is not just a question of keeping up; it's a question of recognizing that the development of theory goes through a certain cycle. It usually comes out of the break in the problematic of a previous dominant theoretical set of positions, and then there's a generative moment when it's putting genuinely new conceptions into the field. When you look at them, those new conceptualizations are never entirely novel; you'll find previous echoes. They are a reconfiguration of new and old elements rather than a literally a discovered truth or method. There's never anything absolutely new. Then you get a kind of hardening into a doctrinaire,

sectarian position, and you are either this kind of Foucauldian or that kind of Foucauldian, but it would be anathema to offer any sort of tentative criticism of anything that Foucault says. And that is a sure sign that it's about to be disrupted by another paradigm—we're just waiting for the next one to appear. But if you are really not interested in that game of succession but are interested in what theory can deliver, you have to plot a less extreme path, a path that does not allow you to give yourself entirely to any one theory. Rather, you must keep your antennae open to the truth in the previous theories that had to be destroyed but that then have to be taken over. For example, the predominance, the absolute exclusiveness, of the concept of class in Marxism prevented us from understanding questions about race, gender, and sexuality. The next move is not to abandon class altogether but to reintegrate it into another position that isn't all-encompassing and obscuring.

So, you haven't really lost anything. What Marx had to say about class has some relevance, though not within the paradigmatic framework in which he developed it. The next move is already open to hear some echoes and to read some people who have now gone out of fashion because they had something important to say. And, similarly, one has to have the antennae turned toward the future, where the dogmatic closure of the theoretical world will try, as all closures do, to establish an identity position among, say, all Foucauldians, or all Lacanians, or all Deleuzians. And by that very act of closure, some positions will be left outside—because history is never finished—and those positions will become the excluded, constituted other that will return to haunt the field and disturb the paradigm, to ask some questions which can't be asked within that framework. So once you know that this is how theories work, you can't become the disciple of a theory—you can't. I'm profoundly influenced by Gramsci, but I'm not "a Gramscian" in the sense that I think everything Gramsci said was right or that I would defend everything that he said.

Theorizing requires a certain conceptual distance from an investment in the security of a paradigm that's all self-sufficient, in a sense an arbitrary closure, in order to act. That's how language works, and on a more general level that's how theory works. Of course, to write any particular piece or to think

through any particular problem, you do have to locate yourself somewhere theoretically from which you can think. I remember in the very heady days of the early 1970s that I had graduate students who were rendered speechless by theory. They could not put down a sentence because they could already see the theoretical objections to it. They couldn't say, "This is really so," because "the real," you know, was being interrogated. They were completely paralyzed by theory. I'd reply, "It's not forever; just try to take a position and see what the strengths and weaknesses are. Think from it and see where it takes you in terms of different contexts, different conjunctures, different language games."

Q. You mention in "Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacies" that you carry around at least three "burdens of representation." You say, "I'm expected to speak for the entire black race on all questions theoretical, critical, etc., and sometimes for British politics, as well as for cultural studies. This is what is known as the black person's burden, and I would like to absolve myself of it at this moment." In a recent *JAC* interview, Michael Eric Dyson spoke at length about the complexities of privilege and obligation for a black public intellectual—particularly one who is well-known and highly paid—and the continual self-critique that must accompany such a position. What specific privileges and obligations are a part of being a world-renowned black public intellectual, and how do you balance those tensions?

A. If I think about it more personally and autobiographically, my biography precisely matches the postwar migration. In the early 1950s, there were already some black people living in London. People had come during the war, gone home and come back, but the big wave happened after I came. In 1953 and 1954 lots of people came for the first time to work. In a way, my politics and even my identity have been shaped very much in relation to that historical trajectory.

Q. The political identity of "black," to which you refer in your work?

A. Even the personal identity. My mother would have died at the thought that I might call myself "black." In the Caribbean, the distinction between black and brown, colored and not-so-colored, very light and dark is what the whole social structure was built on, and it still persists in spite of the fact that the Caribbean is now much more manifestly and self-consciously a black culture.

So, the taking on of a black identity was explicitly so. Thinking of myself as a black person, as a black intellectual, was only possible because this community, and with it my own identity, was forming around the dialogue between that community and what was called the "host society." And that host society had to negotiate, had to ask, "Who are these people? How long are they here for? What do we think about them? Why do they speak English?" "Because we colonized them five hundred years ago, that's why." "But why are they different?" "Because they come from Africa." What that society was negotiating, I was negotiating. It's different for someone like Michael Dyson, who is much younger than I am, who comes after civil rights, who comes out of a long, stable, African American community, an African American tradition of resistance and struggle. My identity was formed in relation to the formation of a community itself.

Now, there is a tradition in the Caribbean of what public intellectuals like me are supposed to do: we are supposed to lead; we are supposed to take office in organizations; we are supposed to shape the community. This occurred in a particular political era in the Caribbean, but I didn't think it was right to repeat that. To attempt to represent the life experiences of others was never something I felt called upon to do. There were those who knew what the experience of trying to make a life in Britain was like. I knew it, too, but my life was deeply protected: I went to Oxford, and I had a middle-class education. When I ventured out into the world, of course I was discriminated against, but nobody stopped me from getting a job. I did not share the experiences of people who were constantly refused housing and decent public services. So, how could I presume to lead them? I had a function, of course, which was to try to articulate what they wanted, or to try to find out how they were coping with this adaptation. I tried to learn what their aspirations were, what their problems were, what the problems of adaptation of the second generation were, what the problems of discrimination and racism were, and why this was so deeply embedded in the British response to them. Those were my skills, and I tried through writing, speaking, acting politically to use those skills in the service of that community. But I could not call myself, my experience, representative of theirs. That would have been a categoric mistake; it would have been a deep, profound misrecognition. This is precisely the way we misrecognize

the way in which class intersects with race. Such a misrecognition would have pretended that because we were all black we were all having the same experience, but we were not all having the same experience. I was not having the same experience. I was deeply and profoundly, and remain profoundly, privileged in relation to the majority experience of blacks.

Of course you're connected with them, of course you politically identify with them, of course you share certain experiences with them; society is perfectly well aware that you are black and will treat you in that way in myriad and minute forms. But I can't say I was experiencing what others experienced. Those who were in the front line were in a much more exposed position. So, I tried to find a political role, a role for intellectual work that would genuinely enhance and identify myself, an organic formation that would operate in the areas that I had access to and they didn't. Public speaking, the television, the radio, committees of investigation, police investigations where I might be asked to give evidence—I had access to that. I had a responsibility, a duty, to try to voice as articulately as I could what I understood that experience to be. But I had to ensure to myself and to them that it was an interpretation; it was my interpretation of them. I couldn't sort of deliver myself on the plate as this sacrificial person that you're treating this way. So these are very complicated issues, very complicated issues. I think the problem in translation and adjustment of languages is how class intersects with it, how power and status cut into and make other forms of social division. Class cuts us in a different way from the ways in which race and gender cut us.

The identification across gender doesn't produce the same politics as the identification across race and class. We are disrupted by them rather than formed into a single kind of protesting subject. And, of course, the system then exploits that, and this is a longstanding issue for me. When I was at the Centre for Cultural Studies, young students wanting to get into politics were sometimes impatient, asking, "Why should we go through all of this and study books? Let's just get out there!" It took a lot of time to convince them. They were not street kids; they were extremely privileged, middle-class graduate students. To make a political link with other people requires a practice, not just an expression. They couldn't just dissolve themselves, pretend that

they were really ignorant, inarticulate kids hanging around the street. They were Ph.D. students being funded by the state to do nothing but read books in libraries. It was ridiculous! But they could make contact with those kids in the street, with the workers that they wanted to identify with, and build an organization in which all of their different experiences could be put together to educate one another about what could be shared—all in the same organization, wanting something out of it. (That was Gramsci's notion of the party, you know; it's not the big Communist Party, with a capital *P*.) In other words, you have to go through the translation rather than back to expression. You don't deny that the divisions of labor, class, and education have already transected, broken those organic links. You can't deny that and just pretend we can reaffirm the links as if they will come back into being. "We're not students, we're really workers," they wanted to claim. Rubbish. They'd never worked a minute in their lives! But we could, together, build an organization that would recognize, "I'm a student and you're a worker," and that would then ask, "What do we as students and workers want out of this society? Is there something we could share, build together?" Intellectuals sometimes come on as if what they want to do is divest themselves of their intellectual responsibility and just be the guys in the hood—and they're not. If they *can* make a connection, superb; but that in itself is a politics. It means learning from people you don't know; it means trying to understand experience; it means constructing alliances across differences that are ineradicable.

Q. You suggest in "Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity" that a group—be it raced, gendered, classed, or otherwise marked—may have a sense of its "basic conditions of life" but that it still requires the intellectual to "renovate and clarify" constructions of popular thought. You argue that "common sense" must be transformed by the intellectual into a "more coherent political theory or philosophical current." However, as more and more "popular thought" is staked out by academics in the humanities as legitimate intellectual territory, that territory is necessarily marked by specialized vocabularies, publications, and limited audiences. Can the appropriation and subsequent theorizing of the popular by academics struggling not only for raises, promotion, and tenure, but also for disciplinary identity threaten those intended political objectives?

A. I would like to have thought that they wouldn't. Gramsci's work is particularly interesting here and relates to the discussion in that he always emphasized the need for what he called "organic intellectuals" to operate at both ends of the spectrum and for them to operate in a more sophisticated manner. For them just to be the traditional intellectuals, as we called them, will simply no longer do. At the same time, we require them to understand that those ideas could never have any real political or social impact unless they could connect them, translate them.

It's not necessarily true that the same people are good at doing the translations; intellectuals may not be the right people. They may need to find other people who understand intellectual work and who also are themselves more in touch with popular currents. Gramsci is very interested in the village priest. Village priests in many remote Italian towns are not intellectuals, but because they've been through intellectual training, they have access to a dogma and to certain philosophical conceptions. But they also live the practical life of the people every day: they shop with them; they rear their children. *They're* the translators, not Aquinas. They're how Aquinas becomes a practical philosophy, because the philosophy shapes what people do in and with their everyday lives. This is why the popular became, under Gramsci's influence, such a very profound concept in cultural studies at a certain point in time. The efficacy, making ideas practical, is exactly the same link that one finds in Foucault between discourse and practice. Ideas become institutionalized in the practice of what happens every day in the local hospital, what happens in the clinic, what happens when a doctor encounters a patient in the operating theater—how those ideas become a practice. What he means by discourse is not just ideas; it's ideas translated into everyday practice. Everybody, I think, is aware that this is where one encounters the politics of academic work—not in academics' selling a paper, or turning up in front of the factory gate and pretending they're Lenin. It has to do with their attention to the articulation between the philosophical and the popular. And that, of course, has made the terrain of the popular a privileged object of analysis in a way in which it wasn't before. When we started out, people imagined we were interested in the popular because we watched soap operas and we thought we'd better write about them. In part that's true, but it's not just an indulgence; it is a sign

that even intellectuals occupy the popular. Nobody occupies the philosophical pole only. Everybody reads novels, reads the newspaper, listens to the radio, has conversations; everybody is in both areas. This is why Gramsci says there are people called "intellectuals" who are paid to do intellectual work, and then there is the "intellectual function" which *everybody* does, including people who can hardly read and write. They conceptualize what they're doing, so they are intellectuals in the moment. That is the intellectual function.

In our society these things are separated into different roles, different statuses, different institutional settings, which have their own forms of promotion and demotion, inclusion and exclusion. Nevertheless, almost every individual is between the two, has a foot, a stake in both camps. To take the popular seriously is not just to indulge in a form of populism. The sort of position that says, "*East Enders* is wonderful, *ER* is wonderful, but Shakespeare is rotten," is just an inversion of the old elitism; it's just turned upside down. Nothing has been transformed. However, to notice that the modern novel is also always in part science fiction or thriller or romance as well as serious literature is to open the possibility of transformation.

That kind of work is valuable in a number of different ways, and the fact that that work is enjoyable is a value. I think intellectuals here are rather lucky since they get pleasure out of doing criticism: when they stop enjoying the film, they can enjoy talking about it. But for the people who really just enjoy watching the film and don't have access to a more privileged critical language, I suppose that our talking about film, or talking about television, or talking about rock music can be an appropriation of sorts. Kids used to act as if we had robbed them of their last refuge, their last resistance. The whole thing about rock and pop culture was that it wasn't school. Well, if school is now the domain of the popular, where can they escape to? So there are problems of tactics, too. You can practically hear the explosion of a kind of academic industry of popular culture. Caught up in promotion and tenure, there are those who will benefit from that industry, and I think people are beginning to smell a rat about this. Everybody knows that there are those engaged in various practices that they identify as cultural studies but that are simply a waste of everyone's time—the beetlebrowed, pious references to

the analysis of three new rock lyrics, and so on. There's a bit of idiocy about that. One should not forget why one went to the popular in the first instance; that's why I talked about what Gramsci was interested in. It's not just an indulgence and an affirmation; it's a political, intellectual, pedagogical commitment. Everybody now inhabits the popular, whether they like it or not, so that does create a set of common languages. To ignore the pedagogical possibilities of common languages is extremely political.

Q. You insist in "Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacies" that "Cultural studies . . . refuses to be a master discourse or a meta-discourse of any kind. . . . It is a serious enterprise, or project, and that is inscribed in what is sometimes called the 'political' aspect of cultural studies." How do you answer critics who argue that cultural studies is, in many of its pedagogical applications, in danger of merely replicating the traditional English studies practice of "reading" texts? The first faint rumblings of what may prove to be a significant backlash against cultural studies is now being heard in rhetoric and composition.

A. That's interesting, because I think it's not only from the field of rhetoric that these critiques are emerging; we're hearing all over that people are becoming disillusioned. We're past the point where people are mesmerized by the ascendancy of cultural studies. Rather, they've got their teeth sunk into it, and they're beginning to shake it around a bit, take a bite. You should expect that and welcome it; it can lead to productive debates as well as sterile ones. This is a complicated question because cultural studies is, and should be, practiced in a multitude of ways. It continues to expand widely but also wildly. Textual analysis, however, is really about much more than a traditional notion of "close reading." What is behind the notion of textuality is what I would call "the discursive turn." Saussure has had a profound effect on almost everything, but the importation of the linguistic model, this discursive turn, is quite deeply misunderstood. The moment you affirm that everything is within discourse, it's very hard not to appear to be arguing that everything is discourse, and by "discourse" people are generally not thinking of the articulation between discourse and practice that I talked about before. Everything is not language; nothing operates outside of meaning. A lot of people are practicing cultural studies as if that were the

case, however. And so there is something to the criticism that a lot of what is going on is not much more than old-style practical criticism, close textual reading of a good old Leavisian kind but with some fancy Saussurian or poststructuralist terms and a bit of identity and subject position thrown in. The text is abstracted from its institutional context, from its historical context—that form of what I would call "literary cultural studies" is deeply troubling. You have to work on the text, but you also have to work on the context; you have to know something about the history of the society in which the institutions work as well as about what the technologies of the media are and how they're financed. So, I think there's been a kind of reduction to text in the narrow sense, not text in the broad sense, indicating what I call the discursive turn.

By "discursive turn" all I mean is that no practice is ultimately understandable outside of the context of its meaning. All human practices are embedded in meaning, which is not to say that there is nothing but meaning. There is food, there is nature, there is death, and there are all sorts of things apart from meaning; but no *practice* takes place outside of meaning or outside of the material world—but we don't say that. We're transfixed by the coming of meaning because the whole positivistic thrust of social thought for many centuries has been to downgrade meaning, to see meaning in language as subsidiary. So we are talking about the constitutive role that we want to give to language, discourse, textuality, the work of language itself, and we forefront that, but we are not saying there is nothing but text and endless text; rather, we are saying that no practice exists outside of the framework of its meaning. It comes from somebody who wants it to mean something, it occupies a language which only is a language because it communicates meaning, it is interpretable only because other people either share or bring to bear on it a framework of interpretation: it is discursive from beginning to end. But it's also something else: it's also materialist, economic, political, social, technological. It's not *only* textual because it is textual. This is a fine distinction that is absolutely critical. The reason why I'm insisting on it is that I think many people in cultural studies are themselves complicit with blurring the distinction because they don't want to think about that messy other bit. They just want to go on doing what they've always done but with a new trendy

heading to it. We can all record five television programs and spend twenty hours looking at how the meanings work inside language. If we don't ask anything else about the efficacy of these structures out there either in circulating meanings across the globe or in making profits for CNN, if we aren't interested in any of those other questions, we are not doing anything other than a very sophisticated literary, textual, critical work, and we're therefore vulnerable to just those kinds of criticisms.

In our courses at the Open University, we start by talking about what we call the "cultural studies circuit," which is an intersection of many specific moments. We ask students to identify questions of representation that are about textuality and language—questions of production, questions of consumption. All of those are the moments of a cultural circuit, and for a phenomenon to become truly cultural, it has to pass through all of those and more. For an analysis to be adequate to the object of analysis, it has to refer to all of them. Now, we aren't all experts in all of them. But if your area is the area of production, you have to go to production with the notion that what is being produced is *meaning*, so it has some relation to the moment of representation. You must also see that what you're producing is going to be consumed and that it will be transformed in the consumption, so it also has a relation to the question of consumption. Each moment has an openness to the other moments of the circuit. You can say, "I'm only an expert in representation so that's what I'll do," but you then have to write your analysis in such a way as to reveal the fact that you are not dealing with a number of other things without which not a lot can be said about the cultural impact of the object that you're trying to study. So, you don't study the economics of production as if it's outside of meaning; you look at how economic processes also depend on representation, and so on.

Each of the moments, then, even the moment of technology that appears to be a hard engineering one, is lodged within technology *at a particular time*, and the multiple and competing discourses of technology at any given moment make of technological research and development, of technological consumption and production, a very different thing. The language of progress is one such discourse; the language of environmental damage is another. These are rival discourses out of which the technological

emerges. You don't lose the reference to the discursive turn in each of the moments; it isn't just harnessing old style economics, old style technology, old style audience research to the moment of language and textuality, because each of those other moments has been transformed by the discursive turn which operates throughout. You've given culture and meaning and language a more constitutive place in understanding what the economic is and what the technological is and how the modes of regulation operate; so you've transformed them from a sort of hard, pulsivistic instance, but you *can't* leave them out—this is what we have to understand.

Theory is always closed, because theory can't be infinitely open. It can't match the infinite openness of the world—as I said before, you'd never think anything. So you have to understand the arbitrary closure that is required to make sense of a thing theoretically; but, nevertheless, you have to write as if it is possible to sketch in or indicate how this analysis might be transformed once we bring the other moments in, too. So the textual critic is not required to become an economist as well. On the other hand, the more interdisciplinary the work, the more varieties of these skills will be harnessed in analyzing the object. At any rate, the textual critic can say, "This is a reading of the text; those are the meanings which are potential in this text. Which ones did the audience take?" I don't know, because I'm an audience of one—that is, me. What I can give is a good guess about what a lot of people like me might have taken from the work, but we know very well that people take all sorts of meanings from messages because messages are not closed. The moment of representation is not closed from the moment of interpretation, consumption, and transformation. You have to leave open the possibility that people are watching the same thing that you are and reading something completely different from it. We have to be more tentative. A kind of certainty arises from textual criticism in which one says, "Those are the meanings and I have nothing else to say. There are a lot of symbolic meanings that you can't get, but this is the meaning of the text." What is that kind of critical analysis but a return to what Bauman calls "the critic as legislator"? This comes out of what I would call—and I use the phrase deliberately, with all its masculinist connotations—an attempt at "mastery" going on in cultural studies scholarship. In this the critic is sort of overcoming the text, squashing the text. It's a claim that one has

got the full measure of a text, and it is a way of validating one's own practice as the master reflects back on his or her own genius. The claim and appearance of brilliance enhances one's institutional position in the field, but there's a lot more to practice than just identifying oneself as a professional of one sort or another. Critical practice has a lot of social implications as well.

Q. You explore the term *ethnicity* in "New Ethnicities," arguing that the word has been "deployed, in the discourse of racism, as a means of disavowing the realities of racism and repression." You argue that this "appropriation will have to be contested, the term disarticulated from its position in the discourse of 'multiculturalism.'" Do you see the discourse of multiculturalism as a negative force, then, in the work that a recuperated notion of ethnicity might do within a new politics of representation?

A. I'd like to answer that by saying something briefly about the negative aspects both of ethnicity and of multiculturalism, because I think they're linked. Multiculturalism very much invokes ethnicity because what does multiculturalism mean? Well, a society is multicultural and that is to say it is composed of different ethnic groups. Clearly, people have different cultures even if the concept of race is a bit dubious scientifically. Now, the form of multiculturalism that I have difficulties with is the one that has an essentialized notion of ethnicity.

Everybody secure within his or her own ethnic group is competing with other ethnic groups on a hierarchy for resources; so the Koreans are above the Hong Kong Chinese, who are above the Puerto Ricans, who are above the blacks, and so on. But each individual is slotted into a pluralist space here. I have no objections to the term *multicultural* used adjectivally—Britain has become a multicultural society—but not if it's organized in this hierarchical or stratified or essentializing way. What I mean by multicultural, then, is that society has been mongrelized. You look out and you don't know whether kids are black or white or North African; it's just the pluralization of kinds of people (not cultures) which now make up a city like London. You have no idea how London has been transformed in fifteen or twenty years; you have no conception. It did not look like this at one time. And it's different from an American city because the groups are not watertight. It's like New York in some ways, but it's unlike other American cities where one is very much aware of the fact that it's

multicultural in the sense that there are lots of different "cultures," but each culture is very much protective of its own self. Of course, we have that here, too, but there's been a lot more sliding and translation between them. So, which of those two is strictly pluralist in the old sense—in segmented, clearly identifiable, originary, and essentialist ethnic segments?

If each individual is ascribed to one of those ethnic segments, the term *multicultural* simply describes the many segments, whereas adjectivally *multicultural* describes a society that has been messed up or mongrelized by the variety of peoples who probably do tend to locate themselves more in one group than in another but who are not so formally fixed into groups. That kind of fixing has not been located in institutional practices, so resources are not given out in that way. Resources here are allocated in radically different ways than in the U.S. It's very odd to have any government resources given out to Cypriots only, or to Bangladeshis only. We can't do that. You can give it to the East End, where mainly the people are Bangladeshi; but you have to do it because you're giving it to a poor community, not because you're giving it to an ethnic group.

It's about citizenship. And this is different from a pluralist society. It's a funny piece of history that the U.S. has a much longer tradition and history of ethnic pluralism—it's made out of it—whereas Britain has always conceived of itself as culturally homogeneous. But the impact of globalization and migration on the two societies has been a little different. In the U.S., recent migration has been absorbed into and has complexified the pluralist hierarchy, whereas in Britain what it has done is simply blur its homogeneous origin. This is not to say that informally there isn't group identification. For instance, at one time the term *black* covered both Asian and Afro-Caribbean people, but it doesn't any longer. So there's a bit of a strengthening of ethnic identity here because now people will say, "Black and Asian" (which, if you think about it, is an extremely odd mixture because one is racial and the other is ethnic), and by that they mean the two major minority groups are the Afro-Caribbean and the subcontinent of Asia (which of course doesn't hold up any longer because within that Hindu and Muslim are completely different). But the point is that they are beginning to make a distinction. So we are beginning to have more ethnic identification in Britain, but

it is not anywhere so clearly stratified as in the U.S., and it's not legally and officially acknowledged. There's no law saying money can go to help Muslims. How ethnicity plays in Britain and the U.S. is rather different, and consequently what the term *multicultural* means is rather different. The critique of the use of the term *multicultural* in the U.S. wouldn't apply in quite the same way here. There are people here who say we don't like the term *multiculturalism*, but nobody in England would object if you said that this is a "multicultural society." Adjectivally, everybody understands that what has happened is cultural diversity, cultural pluralization.

The term *multiculturalism* can operate in very different contexts and have very different meanings. The same thing is true of the term *ethnicity*. In my terminology, everybody has an ethnicity because everybody comes from a cultural tradition, a cultural context, an historical context; it is the source of their self-production, so everybody has an ethnicity—including the British: Englishness. It's very important to say that because in the current discourse, Englishness is not an ethnicity; Englishness is like white, what the world is, and black is marked. Ethnic minority groups are marked, but Englishness is unmarked. One thing that has happened as a result of multiculturalism in Britain, as a result of its becoming a multicultural society, is that Englishness is increasingly contested. It has become aware of itself as a distinctive ethnic identity, and there's a big debate about what Englishness is, what Englishness is now. Does Englishness depend on having an empire, in which case can you be English in the same way in which you were in the nineteenth century? Can you be English and black? There is a huge contestation around the question of the nature of ethnicity. Now, there is also the essentialist notion of ethnicity, which is as I described it earlier: "You are what you are because you are a member of an ethnic group. That is your identity, so stay within it; its traditions are yours, and really you belong in your homeland, and if only you could get the money you would go back home. Unfortunately, you have to wander in the diaspora for a little bit, but that's who you really are." Now, that essentialist notion of ethnicity is extremely damaging because it doesn't allow for pluralization; it doesn't allow for hybridization. In the new generation, in the current youth cultures, there are amazingly generative things happening. They're combining black,

jungle, Indian, and Hindu music—all kinds of extraordinary things. And the last element that could be identified in such work is, "Please go back to your cultural roots." That would be the end of any cultural creativity or productivity. So, I don't think we can do without ethnicity as a concept, but I think there are certain dangerous versions of ethnicity around. That is why I said there has to be a contestation around the very term itself. What do we mean by it? I mean the diverse version of ethnicity, the multicultural, adjectival version of ethnicity. I don't mean the back-to-one's-homeland version of ethnicity. The same term will actually occur in both sentences, but the distinction is very important.

This is where we are with respect to a whole variety of concepts. We can't do without them, but we don't mean them in the old way so we have to use them, as Derrida suggests, "under erasure." *Ethnicity* is one of the concepts that has come under erasure, and so have *modernity*, *Enlightenment*, and *identity*. If I simply say "identity," I don't make it clear whether I'm talking about identity in a Cartesian, Enlightenment sense or identity in a Rushdian sense. It's not clear because the same word can have both meanings. I don't have another word, so I have to use it in such a way as to close out certain connotations and open up others. That's what happened to the term *black*. People didn't find another word, and they had a contestation around that word precisely because it was already inserted in the discourse in a negative way. That was a word that had to be disarticulated from its older discursive configuration and rearticulated in a new one. The politics were exactly about disentangling it from its older, negative notions and reinvesting it with positive associations. The same is going on about concepts such as ethnicity, and one after another the panoply of concepts of post-Enlightenment social science are coming under erasure. They've not been replaced by an entirely new critical or theoretical conceptual vocabulary, but they are on the move; they no longer can be said and thought in the paradigmatic position of their old theoretical constructs. That is why we are in the deconstructive moment. That's what deconstruction means to me; that's what I understand Derrida to be saying: we have no other language but the language of the old metaphysics, the language in which philosophy has been conducted, and it no longer works; but we are not yet in some other

language, and we may never be. We may simply have to occupy the underside, the disturbed, subverted side of the positive concepts—the negative side of a positive concept—in order to think with, rather than waiting for some new dispensation. That is exactly what the notion *post* means for me. So, *postcolonial* is not the end of colonialism. It is after a certain *kind* of colonialism, after a certain moment of high imperialism and colonial occupation—in the wake of it, in the shadow of it, inflected by it—it is what it is because something else has happened before, but it is also something new.

Q. So in a discursive sense, we can articulate new ways of thinking and being while using the same terms, the same vocabulary.

A. Exactly. Writing is kind of a game of defining one's terms against the uses one doesn't want as one goes. Every time I use *ethnicity* I have to make sure that I'm not being slotted back into the essentialist notion of ethnicity or what I'm saying could be completely misunderstood. And there are certain misunderstandings, whether deliberate or not, and I rather like that. Both Homi Bhabha and I use the term *hybridity*, and Robert Young has accused us both of occupying nineteenth-century racial theory because it uses the term *hybridity*. Of course, I'm not talking about hybridity in that sense; I'm using it metaphorically. But I have no other term. I can only take up that term, try to refuse its racist connotations, and try to reinvest it with a new kind of cultural meaning. I don't know how else to talk. But you are always open to exactly that kind of misinterpretation. Someone will always say that if you're talking about ethnicity you're just in one of the old ethnics: "America is an ethnically pluralist society, what's wrong with that, we're a melting pot," and so forth. We are trapped by the deconstructive moment in some of the primary concepts with which cultural studies is trying to operate. These are its concepts. Each of them is no longer tenable in terms of an old vocabulary, but we have no entirely new dispensation with which to think. It requires a kind of double operation, rhetorically, discursively, in that one uses terms that are untenable; one occupies a conceptual world but one no longer believes in the translation.

Q. That kind of double operation would require not only a fairly in-depth and critical understanding of the older, negative discursive configurations—a history, really—it would require a broad and continually updated knowledge of contemporary critical theory.

A. Absolutely. This goes back to the point I made about new and old theories: you can't just generate a new theory without taking on board the baggage that the concepts are already carrying from older meanings. In that sense, theory is often abused in terms of scholarship. These are necessary functions, and just operating on the new is not tenable because the theoretical discourse itself is invested with cultural baggage inherited from the fact that language is thousands of years old.

Q. The work of Angela McRobbie, Hazel Carby, Patricia Williams, bell hooks, and Robin Kelly might all be classified as "cultural studies." Does the umbrella term and received notion of the political project of cultural studies as such water down a feminist agenda when that agenda is subsumed under the broader term?

A. I don't know whether it does. I don't think that this is necessarily so. Cultural studies does function as an umbrella term for a variety of different practices, not all of them the same by any means; a number of very different kinds of inquiries all get hobbled together under that umbrella. But it is part of the new critical theoretical family, so it has a certain relation to feminism, to psychoanalysis, to postcolonial theory, and to poststructuralism. It is part of a configuration of critical languages, rather than one. Now, I suppose the question is, why has it become the umbrella term, and what is the effect of that happening? I think, partly, it has become the umbrella term out of convenience. It's more neutral than feminism, and it's not so specific as psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis mobilizes the anti-Freudians, whereas cultural studies—who can object to studying culture these days? And I suppose its references are broader. Women and the psyche and colonial relations are all part of culture. *Culture* is the broader term, so I suppose the fact that the term *cultural studies* has been adopted is a kind of convenience in that sense. It's a way of signaling something, of signaling that one occupies the terrain of new critical languages, new theoretical ideas, and where the people that you quote use it, it does inflect their work differently. I can think of many feminist theorists who are doing perfectly good feminist theoretical work, but they're not engaged with the way in which feminism has inflected our thinking about culture. They're not engaged in the kind of gendered aspects of cultural forms in the way in which those feminist theorists who use the term *cultural studies* would be. So I think it has made a difference,

and I think you can see that. I think of important work in feminist epistemology—for instance, Sandra Harding's work—but it's not cultural studies. I don't mean to rule it out, but if your principal interest is in developing the argument that your project has a bearing on other cultural theories, I don't know if I'd call that cultural studies; I don't know what you'd be getting by calling it cultural studies. On the other hand, bell hook's work on the intersection of gender, race, and representation is about cultural identity and representation. These are classical cultural studies concerns, really.

I'm not giving a very satisfactory answer to this question, and I think the reason is that I've always been afraid of policing the term cultural studies. I've always been particularly afraid of my own role in such policing because I was close to the beginning when the term began to be used and because of the placement of Birmingham in the development of cultural studies generally. It's very hard not to have a kind of patriarchal relationship to it.

Q. Stuart Hall as owner and founder of cultural studies?

A. Exactly—owner, founder, and sort of stepfather. I think it would be quite wrong; I'm just not interested in doing that. I tend to be more flexible and fluid: I go not to the labels but to the work. Okay, you can call this cultural studies if you like, but is there something distinctive about the work which wouldn't have been done without the traditions of thinking and writing that have been inherited from cultural studies? If there is, then I think it's a perfectly valid usage.

Cultural studies is not a discipline in its own right; it never has been, and I don't think it should aspire to be. It identifies a field of work, a configuration of different theoretical traditions as defined by a set of preoccupations, but it's not a discipline in its own right and it doesn't aspire to disciplinary status. Cultural studies has always been interdisciplinary, and this was true in Britain right from the very beginning. The first cultural studies department came out of a rather contingent ensemble of different disciplines. It just happened that the people at Birmingham were in sociology, literature, and history. But the people in Portsmouth were in literature, history, and the visual arts or film. So you wind up with a different inflection. The people in Middlesex have always come out of a very strong visual arts history and tradition, but there are people at Birmingham who also belong to that. Dick

Hebdige is as much a member of that tradition as he is of anything else. So I don't think these labels should be too tightly articulated to a disciplinary label.

Q. *Policing the Crisis*, although twenty years old, continues to inform our notions of national identity and the nature of crime. Policing has come under massive public scrutiny in the U.S. in recent years, with recurring outcries against institutional racism and condoned violence fueling an already volatile situation. Discussions of policing and law and order in general are once again being talked about in the context of "community" in an effort to address localized charges of racism and brutality. What do you think is not being said in discussions of community policing? In other words, how would you envision an effective sequel to *Policing the Crisis*?

A. Well, I don't know about a sequel because in some ways *Policing the Crisis* represents a continuity in my work that already exists. I continue to work in and on concepts of race and ethnicity. It represents continuity also in terms of how I want to think questions of race because it doesn't autonomize race. I want to think race in relation to British politics and in relation to national identity. Did you know that *Policing the Crisis* was researched by myself and four graduate students and that all the graduate students were white? And that the project came out of the activity of one of those students who was researching the case of a particularly violent incident and the subsequent wave of moral panic? It was a mugging—one of the first cases where the American term *mugging* was used—and the kids were Irish. The key articulation was, "What's happening in the U.S. is now going to happen here, so we can import the terminology, the conception of urban violence, the racialized images of crime, and the forms of policing. Everything can be brought over. So, it deals with race but in a distinctive way. It's not a black text—I think I can put it that way. It engages with black questions and black politics and questions of race, but it's not a black text. Those are continuities because I've always wanted to write about race in that way. On the other hand, it represents a huge shift because what we saw as a result of *Policing the Crisis* was the coming of Thatcherism. We looked into the crisis of Englishness that was working itself out through these discourses on race, crime, and youth after 1968 and into the 1970s. You could see that law and order was the response, not just to the question of urban crime or

to race but to the whole crisis of British national identity. People were panicking. They said, "This society is breaking apart, it's diversified by immigration, it's no longer an imperial society, it's declining economically. Communities are breaking down; how can we be sure of who and what we are?" A law and order response was made in an attempt to stop what was perceived as a hemorrhage. What *we* asked was, "Where is this law and order response coming from?" It was coming partly from the state in the form of policing and the judiciary and political spheres; it was coming partly from the demand of local communities themselves who felt threatened by change, white communities who thought of themselves as part of the imperial nation and therefore no longer the greatest nation on earth. They were living cheek by jowl with the people they had hoped to leave in Calcutta, and Delhi, and so on. They felt deeply threatened by change and their feeling was, "We can't walk on the streets." All of these inchoate feelings were indicators of a kind of social crisis. And what we said was, "If this move takes hold, the whole of what in Britain has been the postwar settlement from about the 1950s on, which has been a period of the construction of the welfare state—comprehensive schooling, social democratic kinds of approaches to social problems—will come to an end and a harder-edged, more competitive way of life will come about.

So, *Policing the Crisis* was a huge shift for me because it was a shift into my work on Thatcherism and all of what happened in the 1980s. *Policing the Crisis* is one of the few social science books that is predictively correct: it was right about the 1980s, that Britain was about to be transformed by the experience of Thatcherism. It justified our approach to race because if you'd just taken race as a black issue you'd have seen the impact of law and order policies on the local communities but you'd have never seen the degree to which the race and crime issue was a prism for a much larger social crisis. You wouldn't have looked at this larger picture. You'd have written a black text, but you wouldn't have written a cultural studies text because you wouldn't have seen this articulation up to the politicians, into the institutional judiciary, down to the popular mood of the people, into the politic, as well as into the community, into black poverty, and into discrimination.

So, I suppose an actual answer to your question would be that

if you were writing that book in America, you would have to try to recognize the historical implications of slavery as well as the changes that were made since the civil rights movement. You would have to deal with the unsettled and unsettling business of aspirations and disillusionment, but also with the fracture within the black population into a more successful section of the black middle class and into more bitter deprivation and poverty. A new *Policing the Crisis* couldn't just say, "They're doing to us what they've always done"—although that is, of course, part of it. But saying only that is ineffective and incomplete.

- Q. You have commented at various times, as have others, on the importance of language for ongoing political action and systemic change. New vocabularies and new metaphors enable us to rephrase questions, repose problems, and organize experiences and knowledges in ways that create new spaces for action. How is cultural studies currently positioned to participate in the construction of innovative language?
- A. It does touch on that, but the question is whether cultural studies is still in a very creative, tension-filled relationship, and I find that hard to generalize about, to tell the truth. As I said before, I think it's not in its ascendancy any longer; it's lost some of its novelty. That loss, as we're seeing now, is resulting in critiques of cultural studies itself. There are a lot of questionable practices in writing, publishing, and teaching that aren't doing very much. There's a lot of what I would call "academic repetition." It's difficult for a form of study that has become much more academically assimilated to retain its political cutting edge, and by "political" I mean, very broadly, its image in the area where culture and politics intersect. I don't mean taking up a particular political position in respect to Tony Blair, for instance, but, rather, a concern with questions of culture and power and difference.

My answer is not, I think, touching the heart of your question, however. I don't have an overall sense of whether cultural studies is really generating new ideas, new languages. At the moment, I feel that it's not, but that may be because the political landscape is rather complex, rather difficult to pin down. The new government is a strange beast, really, and people haven't gotten its measure. In broader cultural terms, it's a modernizing force that is socially conservative, and this is a very odd formation. Things seem distributed in different ways; this is rather exciting in terms

of momentum for reform, but it has certain deep limitations lodged right at the center of the project. Old Left positions don't seem to have any purchase on it because those positions are not really engaged with the modern world, with the problems currently facing us. Cultural studies has got a lot of analytic work to do in teasing out underlying background assumptions; it has a lot of work to do in terms of trying to interpret how a society is changing in ways that are not amenable to the immediate political language. Blair will formulate those changes in a certain way, but there's a deeper level of shifts to be included in such analyses, shifts in the popular.

If you think about the response to Diana's death, it was utterly unpredicted and unpredictable—massive, absolutely massive, very different from the classical, public response to the death of a royal. The British response has been modern in some interesting ways, yet was nevertheless tied up with the mystique of sovereignty, of royalty, with the fact that she's a princess, and very beautiful; but it was simultaneously tied up with a confessional culture. She was the first princess who talked about adultery on television. She talked about her anorexia and her bulimia and her life, about going to see a feminist therapist, about going to the gym. This response to her death is a fascinating mixture of old English virtues, English idolatry of royalty, and modern romantic elements where people are turning out the notion of the upper classes. The commitment after fifteen years of Thatcherism to a public philosophy of compassion—of touching people with AIDS, of taking black children in Africa into your arms—is a fantastically complex shaft of light into the British cultural unconscious. For goodness sake, I certainly don't know whether cultural studies has any language for it, but it certainly has some work to do in telling us what is going on in this increasingly multicultural, increasingly diverse, rapidly shifting, regionalizing, British society. There is a lot to do, and not just in the British context. What Australia is doing about the rising, indigenous Australian society and about Australian identity is being looked at; the importation of cultural studies into southeast Asia, which is occurring at a tremendous rate, is another enormous project, and that's happening partly because globalization itself is so deeply tied in with cultural studies. It is deeply connected in cultural economic terms, in terms of hardware, in terms of satellite

technology, in terms of the world investment in the global dissemination of meanings, images and messages. "Culture" has never been such an intensely interesting, complicated object to contend with. I just don't know whether cultural studies is quite up to it, whether it has seen the dimensions of the genie that it let out of the bottle. It was responsible for taking the stopper out of culture's bottle, but now culture doesn't belong to it anymore. There's more talk about culture in management theory: everybody there is talking about cultural change. The politicians and management gurus only talk about cultural change. They don't talk about anything else. They're reading Foucault like crazy, and particular forms of neoliberalism. New-liberal forms of governance—which Foucault is very interestingly and complexly related to—are being taken on by accountants. There's a huge school of Foucauldian accountants. So, I think we're about to be engulfed by culture; it's as if there's almost nothing else but culture left to us now. Cultural studies requires a huge bootstrap operation to lift itself out of its earlier agenda with national cultures and communities so that it can come face to face with these much larger, much wider, much broader, more extensive social relations. I am struck by how much potential work there is, and I feel that cultural studies is not aware of its new vocation. It could be called on to be at the leading edge of measuring new ways of both understanding and implementing social and historical change.

Q. While your work is heralded internationally as vastly important to the humanities, you have been criticized as well. Are there any criticisms or misunderstandings of your work that you'd like to address?

A. You know, I have to say that I don't read criticisms of my work. I have limited time for reading. When I left the Centre for Cultural Studies, I decided that I would contribute in other ways. I participated in compiling a history of cultural studies and of what happened at Birmingham. I don't want to privilege my view over other people's, but I do have a view about what occurred. But when I decided that I wouldn't really participate in the attempt to police the boundaries of cultural studies, what I did was to move to new substantive areas: back into questions of race. I thought it was more important for me to contribute to a particular area of work in cultural studies than to try to be

responsible for deciding where the field was going. In the time that I've had available to read, I have preferred to read in the areas in which I'm thinking and writing, to read what others are doing in such areas rather than what others think about me and my work. I've been more interested in reading the debates about ethnicity and postcolonial theory and its developments than in tracking and responding to the criticisms of my own work. This is not a justification for it, and I think it's not a very good practice because people will think I'm disdainful of my critics, but I just don't know the rude things that they're saying because I haven't read them. Occasionally, I do come across criticisms, and I have the usual prickly responses when people misunderstand me. As you could tell by something I said previously, I was very wounded by Robert Young, that someone as sophisticated as he would willfully misunderstand me, would think that because I use the word *hybridity* I am complicit with nineteenth-century racial theory. But there are many other valid criticisms that I would take on board, but I can't. I am sometimes thought to be not very consistent—eclectic, really—for which I've already offered you a sort of an apologia. I think a certain kind of theoretical eclecticism in our period of heady intellectual and theoretical innovation can be a useful strategy. A friend of mine who says he is forever trying to keep up with these intellectual maneuvers asked me once if I thought that if he ducked he could miss the Lacanian moment! [Laughing.] Sometimes I've felt like ducking and that perhaps it would just go away and be over before I'd had to come to grips with it. So, eclecticism may be an excuse for a sort of lazy intellectual practice, a form of skillful intellectual ducking.

I don't think of myself as a theoretician. I don't have a philosophical mind that would allow me to stay at a certain level of abstraction for a long period of time. I can't sustain that. But that works for me because I'm interested in the dialogical relationship between theoretical concepts and the concrete. I put it that way because I'm not an empiricist either. It's not theory or empiricism; it is theory and concrete conjunctures—that's the interface that I find meaningful and productive. I suppose that's why I've remained more of a Gramscian than many other people who started out that way and have since abandoned Gramsci. Gramsci is interesting in exactly that interface between theory and the concrete, material world. So, it's necessary to know what

you're good at and not pretend you're good at something else. In terms of my work, then, I've come to recognize that texts are only momentary stabilizations and then you give them back to the flow of meaning. They are appropriated by other people who will take from them what they will regardless of your intent. Every reading of a text is basically a translation, not a transmission of originary truth from one moment to another. One must give them away freely. People quite often get something different—but, you know, I got something different from Gramsci than what he'd intended me to get. I use Derrida in a way that would drive formal deconstructionists wild. My own work—and everyone else's, too—must be surrendered to that flow of meaning that will continue to create and recreate something new of the old.